

# *The Village of Hebron*

## *Office of the Mayor*

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Honorable Chairman Ney, Committee Members and guests:

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak on behalf of the residents of our village this morning. As a former council member and the current Mayor serving our community for more than 20 years I believe I have a unique perspective on the matter before the committee today.

I am a lifetime resident of the Village and while I serve my home community as an elected official I am also a full time Professional Fire Chief for another central Ohio community. As you might suspect, the opportunity to respond as a Firefighter/Paramedic to the needs of citizens in times of crisis has given me cause to consider many solutions to the safety and quality of life of our citizens. The CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) program has been a critical and integral part of implementing many of these solutions. I am before you today to support the CDBG program and to share with the committee what the program has meant and continues to mean to us at the local level.

Our small community does not enjoy the massive amounts of revenue some communities enjoy for large recreational centers, wide landscaped boulevards, fancy street lights and huge community centers. Our needs tend to be much more basic things like a simple sidewalk to get our children off of the edge of a busy State highway. This allows them to walk to parks and the library without being within four feet of semi trucks traveling at a high rate of speed. We need culverts and storm drains to improve drainage in residential areas that are 150 years old so people can stop living in fear of their basement flooding. We need curbs to retain the storm runoff and channel it out of town to alleviate annual flooding. We need shelter houses at our parks to protect the children when the storms roll in quickly and the lightning begins to strike and to have a place to gather for the annual pot luck trophy awards for the various programs. We need paved walkways so disabled grandparents can get up to the fence to watch a great grandchild hit that homerun or maybe kick a goal.

We recognize that it is our local responsibility to find ways to provide these improvements. Our elected officials, village staff and scores of volunteers work many long hours to make projects happen. As everyone knows, the types of community improvements I have mentioned are expensive. Our council has in the past, and will continue, to commit available funds to these improvements every year. Some years grants are not forthcoming and the projects are scaled back to those we can do with 100% funding from the village.

There have been many of these. Other years grants such as CDBG have played a major role in improving the quality of life for our residents and visitors.

Some of the projects have included the following:

1996, 1997, 1998.....A multi phase project to install storm drains, curbs and sidewalks was completed with major support from CDBG. This project not only enhanced the appearance of the area but significantly reduced flooding, created safe walking areas for residents and children and improved the quality of life for everyone in the area. There was one place where no sidewalk existed previously and children had to ride through a yard on bikes or on State Route 40 with high levels of traffic. CDBG helped put them on a sidewalk.

In the early 2000's a local philanthropic foundation was most generous in providing a large piece of ground for a park at the west end of the village. A flurry of activity took place with volunteers and "Natureworks" grants working together to develop soccer fields, baseball fields, a protected wetlands, a concession stand build by volunteers from the local "BIA" group and other Council funded improvements. It is truly a gem for our community. Unfortunately it was located at the end of a busy street that did not have sidewalks for safe access or a bridge to cross a large drainage channel. Children from all over the village had to walk or ride their bikes on a narrow road that is heavily trafficked to reach the park.

CDBG stepped in with a grant that helped Hebron to fund the installation of several sidewalks and a bridge over the stream and now everyone is able to reach the park safely on foot or bicycle or skates or skateboard or...oh well, you get the idea. People love the access and love the park and the amazing improvement in the quality of life it brings.

In 2001 the Village opened a new municipal building on a site at the far west side of the village. Part of the complex is an amazing library that is used extensively by everyone in the area. The Hebron elementary school is also in the west end of town and children often come in groups to tour the municipal complex and to visit the library. Until 2002 there were no sidewalks to reach the facility and once again Hebron found a wonderful partner in CDBG. A grant was issued for the completion of a sidewalk from the existing CDBG funded sidewalk at Ninth Street to the municipal complex and the flow of walkers and children is astounding.

The most recent project in partnership with CDBG is another sidewalk and storm drain that connects an area of low income housing with the sidewalks on West Main Street for access to the rest of the village. This apartment complex and housing area is located in such a way that children going to the local school to catch a school bus had to walk a very narrow strip adjacent to State Route 40 with traffic moving at 35-55 mph. It is amazing to me that no child was maimed or killed in this area. With CDBG assistance a sidewalk and bridge was installed that moved pedestrians 15+ feet from the roadway and a large drain was installed to improve storm runoff in the area.

In summary, CDBG and the Village of Hebron have been great partners in taking steps forward to improve the quality of life for residents and particularly the children of the village. I am very much aware that at high levels these programs appear to just be about concrete and sidewalks and drain pipes and many other very inanimate things. Please be assured that is not how CDBG funding is viewed by this community.

CDBG is about the child who gets to participate in a program at the park that they can safely reach on a bike or on foot and the impact the program has on that child's life. CDBG is about the heartbreaking funeral for the third grader that never happens because a sidewalk was installed. CDBG is about the 85 year old widow on Social Security who lives in her home of 50 years and does not have a flooded basement to cope with because the street storm drains were improved. CDBG is about the wheelchair confined person who can actually leave the house and go from one end of town to the other visiting with friends, having an ice cream cone on a summer day, and doing some shopping because CDBG helped put sidewalks and curbs in place.

CDBG is about people, and from my perspective is one of the most positive and productive programs I have witnessed in my many years of public service. Hebron is a much better place for everyone because of the CDBG funding and we hope to be a partner in this program for many years. Even in times of tight budgets the Village intends to continue helping the people of our community with these types of projects and to creatively find ways to fund them. Without CDBG funding the quantity and quality of projects will be significantly reduced and the safety and quality of life for our residents and children will be greatly diminished.

As a spokesman for the residents of Hebron I strongly encourage those who fund the CDBG program to seriously consider the impact of this program and the value it brings at the local level.

It seems to me that in these times of billions of dollars being dispensed by our Federal government around the world, sustaining and even increasing the funding for this and other programs that so directly benefit our fellow Americans should be of paramount importance to our elected representatives. I applaud your efforts as Chairman of this committee to highlight and support the needs of our local communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these comments with you today.

*Original signed by*

Clifford L. Mason  
Mayor